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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses Program Management (PM), a decision-making process which uses a diachronic, idea-generating communication mode. Decision making according to a PM model entails obtaining a mandate or authorization, identifying the problem, exploring for knowledge and generating solutions, reviewing proposals and developing resources, administering the project, and transferring technology or facilitating "spin off." As a mechanism which facilitates organizational innovation, PM may be appropriate for planning public relations programs for exceptional events. Awareness of the tactical processes required to make effective decisions about exceptional public relations events should benefit practitioners. In addition, PM may be an appropriate way to integrate public relations duties with executive planning and control. (KS)

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PLANNING PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAMS FOR EXCEPTIONAL EVENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Two types of decisions occur within organizations: programmed decisions where routine procedures and decision criteria have been established to handle reoccurring situations; and, nonprogrammed decisions, where nonroutine procedures and novel decision criteria are used to deal with exceptional events.[1] An exceptional event is "either an unrecognized generic event or a new type of event likely to occur in the future."[2]

PR managers, because they are boundary spanners, often engage in making decisions about nonroutine, uncertain problem situations;[3] for example, a PR director developing a PR program for a probable crisis or a threatened consumer boycott or a major proxy fight. However, for many PR managers routine procedures are available for dealing with fairly certain problem situations; for example, a PR director issuing a press release, writing a speech, or preparing audio-visual materials.

PR managers most often make decisions about situations somewhere between these extremes; unfortunately, many of these managers make inefficient decisions. An efficient decision-maker can distinguish between situations which require novel decision criteria.[4] As Koehler, Anatol and Applbaum state: "It is ineffective and inefficient to deal with an exceptional problem as though it were routine, or a generic problem as though it were an exceptional case."[5]

There is an agreement in the literature that the decision-making process involves defining the problem, constructing decision-making criteria, identifying alternative solutions, evaluating alternatives, selecting and implementing an alternative, evaluating it, and making modifications.[6] This paper will discuss the practical and

theoretical implications of a decision-making process that is appropriate for exceptional events.

The process to be discussed in this paper is often referred to as Progeam Management (PM).[7] PM may be an effective way for PR practitioners to overcome some of the obstacles to effective planning Cutlip and Center mentioned:

1. Failure of management to include the practitioner in deliberations that lead to policies and programs.'
2. Lack of clearly agreed upon objectives for implementing the public relations program.
3. Lack of time which is stolen by the pressures of meeting daily problems.
4. The frustrations and delays which practitioners encounter in the endless task of internal clearances and coordination with other departments.

PM evolved from the planning strategy developed by the National Aeronautic and Space Administration, and it has been adapted successfully by both public and private organizations.[9] As a structured method of decision-making, PM deals with the first two obstacles mentioned above by emphasizing participatory management, explicit planning mandates and problem identification. PM does require time to be effective; and, this paper will discuss the limitation. PM's emphasis on compromise and negotiation may reduce the frustrations PR practitioners feel with having to get clearances, because PM considers proposal review and clearances an essential consensus-building procedure. Initially, traditional planning strategies will be discussed; then, a sequence of planning stages approproate for exceptional PR events will be discussdd. Finally, the concept of a PR situation will be used to generate a variety of propositions about PM, and these and other theoretical issues will be dis ussed.

PLANNING MODES

PM emphasizes diachronic, as opposed to synchronic, decision-making. According to Thayer, synchronic modes of communication are

attempts at aligning and sychronizing modes of communication according to predetermined priorities.[10] Diachronic modes of communication are deliberate search procedures and problem identification efforts which encourage the generation of new ideas and understandings in the absence of predetermined priorities. There may be appropriate stages in the process of diachronic decision-making when tentative priorites can be set and synchronic modes of planning and decision-making implemented.

Synchronic planning strategies are too often the only type of PR planning stressed in the PR literature. However, they are important decision-making strategies for fairly predictable situations. One of the most widely used synchronic planning strategies is PERT, Program Evaluation Review Technique, with its emphasis on determining the most critical path to achieving a predetermined goal.[11] However, PERT and similar less sophisticated methods, such as making schedules and "calendarizing," essentially focus on time. Synchronic planning does not attempt to generate novel solution to exceptional PR situations; instead it focuses on getting the job done on time.

By comparison, PM takes time to implement, but its primary purpose is to generate innovative solutions to complex problems. As conceptualized by Delbecq and Van de Ven, PM is divided into six distinct stages (see Figure 1).[12]

1. Obtaining a mandate. Often an overlooked aspect of planning procedures, legitimating the planning effort by receiving specific (written) authorization from top management is critical for getting cooperation from organizational elites and resource controllers.

PM stresses a consensus, compromise approach to decision-making. Consistent with concepts used by Lawrence and Lorsch,[13] Burns,[14] and others.[15] Delbecq and Van de Ven posit that "integration...is the basic raison d'etre for a PM design."[16] A structural mechanism used to facilitate compliance

with this norm is an organizational-wide, representative, small group charged with the responsibility of overseeing, but not necessarily participating in, the PM planning process. The mandate should authorize the formation of this group. In describing appropriate roles for PM, Delbecq and Van de Ven suggest that a "program manager" chair this group, and that the primary responsibilities of the program manager are: 1) program ligitimation, 2) obtaining resources, and 3) overall planning and coordination. Characteristics of the program managers are: an "elder statesman" role within the organization, an extensive informal network of contacts, tolerance for ambiquity and low dogmatism.[17]

2. Identifying the problem. This stage brings together possibly interested parties and public represenatives to have them define as precisely as possible the problem situation.[18] Both informal and formal research procedures are used to identify the problem. The initial phase of the search involves determining the overall mission; however, the focus of the entire research efforts is on the causes and characteristics of the problem situation; the search procedure is not focused on solutions to the problem.[19]

3. Exploring for knowledge and generating solutions. After the problem is accurately defined, PM brings together specialists and experts who can speak to the problem issue, and these experts identify alternative solution strategies, nominating a set of preferred solutions.[20]

4. Reviewing proposals and developing resources. Once alternative solutions are generated, written proposals for feasible solutions are circulated to key decision-makers, resource controllers and people able to veto or sabotage the program; and these people make modifications and agree

to necessary funding. The completion of this stage in the PM process is a formal proposal, recommended for adoption.[21]

5. Administering the project. After the proposal is reviewed and accepted by the decision set, a project administrator and staff are assigned the task of implementing the project proposal.[22]

6. Transferring technology or facilitating spin-off. Proposals which suggest major changes in organization behavior often will not be implemented initially on a full-scale basis, but rather will be pilot tested; and, following a successful pilot test, the innovative program may be transferred or "spun off" to other parts of the system.[23]

EXCEPTIONAL PR EVENTS

PM is not appropriate for routine problems.[24] It is a sophisticated planning strategy for dealing with nonroutine, complex problem situations. Ehling defines PR situations as environments in which certain kinds of intergroup (as opposed to inter-personal) problems occur.[25] Ehling states that a PR situation occurs when the problem can be mediated via social communication, when the situation requires joint decision-making, and when the situation "gives rise to conflict between social groupings about how to obtain a desired solution.[26] His definition allows a PR situation to be explicated in terms of the degree to which the situation meets these criteria; by so doing, Ehling is aiding the development of theories about PR. For example, Ehling's definition of a PR situation suggests the following propositions concerning diachronic modes of communication.

1. Assuming the problem is a social communication one the

more critical joint decision-making, the more likely diachronic modes of communication, such as PM, will be used.

2, Assuming the problem is a social communication one, the greater the conflict about a desired solution, the more likely diachronic modes of communication, such as PM, will be used.

These two dimensions of a PR situation--degree of conflict, and relative importance of joint decision-making--can be used in a factorial design (see Figure 2) to locate two types of PR situations: 1) situations where there is a low degree of conflict and emphasis on joint decision-making; and, 2) situations where there is a high degree of conflict and emphasis on joint decision-making. The previously mentioned examples of routine PR activities--writing speeches, issuing press releases, preparing audio-visual materials--are appropriate modes of social communciation for the first problem situation; and, deliberate search proceduces and problem identification efforts for the later PR situation.

Empirical support for the predicted differences between problem situations and degree of PR activities is found in the research of Grunig.[27] Grunig surveyed 216 organizations employing PR practitioners and measured 16 PR procedures, among other organizational variables. He factor analyzed the communication variables into two groups, which approximate Thayer's conception of synchronic and diachronic modes of communication. Table 1 gives the factor loadings for the two types of organizations. Notice that press releases, writing speeches and preparing audio-visual materials are loaded together as synchronic procedures, while formal and informal surveys before a project, and formal and informal surveys to evaluate a project, are loaded together as diachronic procedures.

Grunig also analyzed the organizations according to the decision situation in which the organization was embedded. For those organizations faced with changing enviroment and cognizant of alternative solutions, more diachronic modes of PR behavior were observed. For those organizations faced with a fairly stable enviroment and less aware of alternatives, more synchronic modes of PR behavior were observed.[28]

The research of Vroom and Yetton also supports the proposition that the decision situation influences the degree of emphasis on participatory management.[29] Their normative model of decision-making predicts that when acceptance of a solution is uncertain and when there is conflict about a preferred solution, then, as a manager...

> "You share the problem with your subordinate as a group. Together you generate and evaluate alternatives and attempt to reach agreement (consensus) in a solution. Your role is much like that of chairman. You do not try to influence the group to adopt 'your' solution, and you are willing to accept and implement any solution which has the support of the entire group."[30]

Assuming a PR director is faced with making decisions about an exceptional PR event, the Vroom-Yetton model predicts that even when the director knows what information is needed, who has it and how to get it--even if he can make most of the decisions without the aid of others--participatory management techniques are best.[31]

PM COORDINATION

PM facilitates participatory management. In fact, PM assumes that cooperation and financial support from critical others are essential. As Delbecq and Van de Ven state: "The primary function of a PM design is to provide an integrative mechanism for bringing together resources facilitating a developmental program."[32]

An important PM role is the program coordinator whose task is to facilitate interactions between relevant publics and who shares characteristics associated with PR specialists and other boundary spanners: the effective coordinator pays more attention to others and to their feelings, attempts to establish friendly relationships and a sense of team spirit.[33] Besides interpersonal skills, the program coordiantor should speak the language" and understand the technical parlance associated with the problem situation. "What is required is not a technical expert, but a facilitate who is technically literate."[34]

One of the primary responsibilities of the program coordinator the recruitment of PM participants. Participants assist at each stage of the PM process. Normally they receive temporary assignments to participate in the planning process; however, they may express reluctance to participate in planning efforts that may take them away from their own organizational subunits, where most of their status and prestige are located. The anxiety expressed by PM participants should be dealt with directly when the participant is recruited, according to Delbecq and Van de Ven, and a formal arrangement made to insure that the released personnel are guaranteed reentry to the 'permanent' assignment.[35]

DISCUSSION

Theoretical and practical considerations are suggested by a number of contextual variables influencing the structure of the PM planning process. Delbecq and Van de Ven suggest that the complexity of planning increases 1) with the increasing number of different organizations and publics affected by the planning effort; 2) the number of potential sources of decision-making vetoes; 3) the visibility and controversy surrounding the planning

making vetoes; 3) the visibility and controversy surrounding the planning effort; 4) the technical difficulty of determining the basic structure and design of the new program; 5) the proportion of resources that have to be committed (funds, equipment and personnel release-time); 6) and, as mentioned earlier, the time-frame restricting the PM process.[36] PM is a fairly lengthy process, and it is inappropriate planning strategy for emergency situations demanding immediate decisions; however, it is a highly structured process that facilitates resolution of tensions within complex problem situations.[37] Other propositions about PM have been suggested:

1. Under stable enviromental conditions and centralized structure, the primary audience for problem identification efforts will be organizational elites.[38]

2. Under turbulent conditions and decentralized structure, the primary audience for problem identification efforts will be opinion leaders from major professional or technical groups.[39]

3. In centralized organizations, the primary legitimating tactic will be documented evidence of successful adoption.[40]

4. In decentraliced, professional organizations, technical rationales and endorsements and experimentation will be the primary legitimating tactics.[41]

5. As the decision set size increases, the need for early review and compromise on global characteristics of the proposal increases.[42]

6. As the decision set becomes more differentiated, the need for integrative or boundary spanning personnel increases.[43]

A major assumption in the PR literature is that the structure and function of the planning process will not vary significantly from one type of organization to another. As stated by Delbecq and Van de Ven:

> "The central features of a pure-type PM unit will be consistent across organizations, since the determining imperative is the technology of the development as opposed to the technology of the organization in which the developmental unit is embedded, or the 'core' technology of the prototype program."[43]

This proposition contradicts institutional and contingency models of organizational behavior which posit that enviromental and other contextual variables set up contingencies to which organizations adjust their behavior.[45] Grunig's research suggests such a contingency: that "problem solving" decision situations will elicit diachronic modes of social communication, while "fatalistic" decision situations will reinforce synchronic modes of communication.[46] It can be expected that the PM process, as a diachronic mode of decision-making, will vary depending on enviromental and contextual variables.

CONCLUSION

PM is a multi-stage planning process for dealing with nonroutine, uncertain problem situations. The innovative process has been described as going through several stages: stimulus, conception, proposal, adoption, implementation, and transfer.[47] PM is a planning process that goes through analogous stages: first, there is a problem situation which is recognized by an organizational boundary spanner, such as a PR person; a mandate is obtained legitimating the requirement for a decision; the problem is explored; solutions generated; proposals reviewed and accepted; finally, programs are implemented and possibly transferred. As a mechanism facilitating organizational innovations, PM may be appropriate for planning PR programs for exceptional events. Being aware of the tactical processes required to make effective decisions about eccepctional PR events should benefit practitioners. PM seems an appropriate procedure for dealing with complex situations. PM also may be an appropriate way to more fully integrate PR duties with executive planning and control.

FOOTNOTES

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13. Lawrence, et. al., Op. cit.

14. Burns, Op. cit.

15. Rolf P. Lynton, "Linking an Innovative Subsystem Into the System," Administrative Science Quarterly, 14, 1969; David L. Wilemon and John P. Cicero, "The Project Manager: Anomalies and Ambiguities," Academy of Management Journal, 13, 1970.

16. Delbecq, and Van de Ven, Op. cit., p. 6.

17. Delbecq, and Van de Ven, "Organizational Roles in Program Management," Op. cit., p. 11.

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19. For a detailed discussion of problem identification see, A. L. Delbecq, A. H. Van de Ven, and D. H, Gustafson, Group Techniques for Program Planning, (Chicago: Scott Foresman, 1975)

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22. Delbecq, and Van de Ven, "Organizational Roles in Program Management," Op. cit., p. 22.

23. Delbecq, and Van de Ven, "The Generic Character of Program Management," Op. cit., p. 10.

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25. William P. Ehling, "Public Relations Administration, Management Science and Purposive Systems," Public Relations Review, 1, 1975, p. 33.

26. Ibid.

27. James E. Grunig, "An Organizational Theory of Public Relations," Journalism Monographs, (in press). See also Grunig, "A Multi-Systems Theory of Organizational Communicatiin," Communication Research, 2, 1975.

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30. Ibid., p.13.

31. Ibid., p. 36.

32. Delbecq and Van de Ven, "The Generic Character of Program Management," Op. cit., p. 13-19.

33. Delbecq and Van de Ven, "Organizational Roles in Program Management," Cp. cit., p. 13-19.

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35. Ibid.

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37. A case study from Allen Center's Public Relations Practices (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1975) can illustrate how PM might have been applied to an exceptional event. The case, title "Won't You Come Home, Nurse Bailey?," (pg. 5-10) demonstrates how an exceptional event was treated with a synchronic "get out the word" PR campaign. The facts, briefly: In 1966 the Maryland Hospital Council issued a report indicating a major shortage in trained nurses, even though more than 1,000 nursing positions were budgeted and available throughout the state. the Council "expressed the hope that a statewide refresher program for inactive nurses would be approved under the Manpower Development and Training Act. If 10 percent of the estimated 4,000 inactive nurses returned to work, the report said, the shortage would be greatly eased." The PR director of the council who was able to "squeeze of scrounge about $300," implemented a campaign consisting of a direct-mail letter to inactive nurses, with a follow up folder being sent to those nurses who responded to the initial mailing. The folder, designes as a take-off on the popular song "Won't You Come Home Bill Bailey?", was sent to local media, and press releases about the refresher courses and their graduates were issued on schedule. Almost 400 inactive nurses responded to the campaign, with 203 actually reentering the nursing professoon. According to enter, this program was "obviously successful." However, the goal of the Maryland Hospital Council of 400 woturning nrrses was not achieved.

How much more successful would the program have been had the PR director used PM? If PM had been used, this is what might have happened. The Council report would be used as a mandate to establish an oversite

committe composed of various hospital PR personnel, administrators, nursing school officials and others interested in the problem. The PR director for the Council would be a member of this committee; however, the chairperson of the committee would be an "elder statesman" within the Maryland health delivery system. The Council report would suffice as the Problem Identification stage. Fo the second stage, the PR director, serving as program coordinator, would enlist knowledgeable people who would meet (possibly for one day) to break down the problem into major components (i.e., identifying reasons for leaving the nursing profession and why nurses are reluctant to reenter the profession, how inactive nurses could be reached effectively, what appeals would be most acceptable, how to deal with refresher-course-dropouts); and, this group would generate solutions, selecting preferred alternatove approaches and writing a comprehensive p oposal for review by the oversite committee. The proposal would contain at least two PR campaign option-so that reviewers would have a genuine input into the final document. The roposal Review and Resource Development stage probably would have generated more than $300 for the statewide PR campaign. The number of organizations who would benefit from the campaign--if they were approached correctly and given a genuine input into the final form of the campaign--would increase the probabliities for more money. After the proposal was accepted by the oversite committee, it would be implemented by the PR director. An evaluation by the oversite committee of the PR campaign after it had been implemented might have led to suggestions about how the approach techniques could be used in other states facing similar nursing shortages; if so, there might be a stage of transferring the Maryland experience into other areas. Note that in this hypothetical example, the role of the PR director was more than that of the creative direct-mail advertiser; rather, the role was primarily one of coordination and consensus building. Possibly the same direct-mail campaign would have emerged from the PM process. However, it seems likely that a more sophisticated campaign would have been suggested. Also, it is likely that more money would have been available had PM been used.

38. Delbecq, "Contextual Variables Affecting Decision-Making in Program Planning," Op. cit., p.5.

39. Ibid., p. 5.

40. Ibid., p.6.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., p. 9.

43. Ibid.

44. Delbecq, "The Generic Character of Program Management," Op. cit., p. 15.

45. Charles Perrow, Complex Organizations: a Critical Essay, (Glenview, Ill.,: Scott Foresman, 1972).

46. Grunig, Op. cit.

47. Rogers and Shoemaker, Op. cit.

Table 1

Factor Loadings For Two Types of Public Relations Procedures*

	Diachronic	Synchronic
Formal surveys before project	.725	-.081
Formal surveys to evaluate project	.669	-.058
Informal research before project	.716	.092
Informal research to evaluate project	.655	.140
Issuing press releases	.188	.476
Writing Speeches	.023	.574
Preparing Audio-visual material	.244	.522

*Source: James E. Grunig, "An Organizational Theory of Public Relations," Journalism Monographs, (in press).

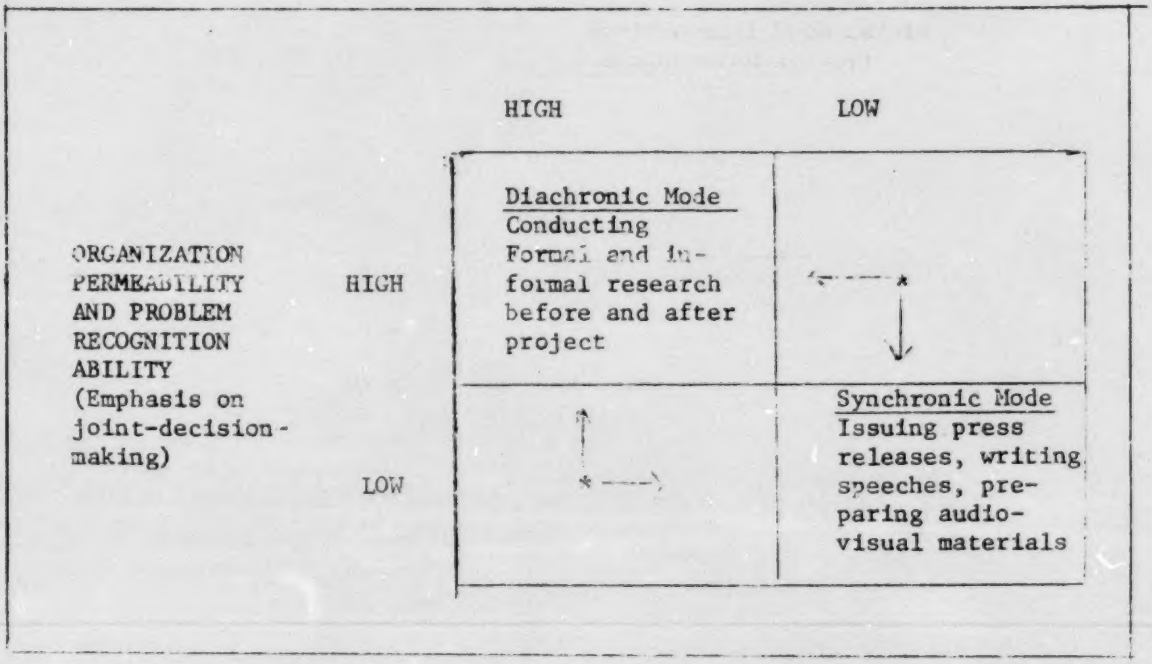

Figure 1

A CONTINGENCY MODEL FOR
PREDICTING DIFFERENCES IN PR MODES OF COMMUNICATION

*Using a similar factorial design, Grunig factor analyzed responses from 216 organizations, and he was unable to locate any organizations which fit either one of these conditions. "Basically, we have found that organizations are either fatalistic, a closed system with a constrained technology and level of knowledge, or problem-solving, an open system facing few constraints. The problem-solving and constraint dimensions, however, have independent effects. Problem recognition encourages internal and external information seeking...Constraints discourage information giving...The fact that only two types of decisions situations could be found, however, shows an interesting deviation of organizational behavior from individual behavior. Organizations appear to be much more adaptive systems than are individual humans. When organizations face constraints from their enviroment, they close themselves off. When they face few constraints, they become open and innovative. Unlike humans, however, they seem incapable of recognizing their constraints...or closing themselves off from the envirement when it offers opportunities." (Grunig, Journalism Monographs; in press; p. 83-84).

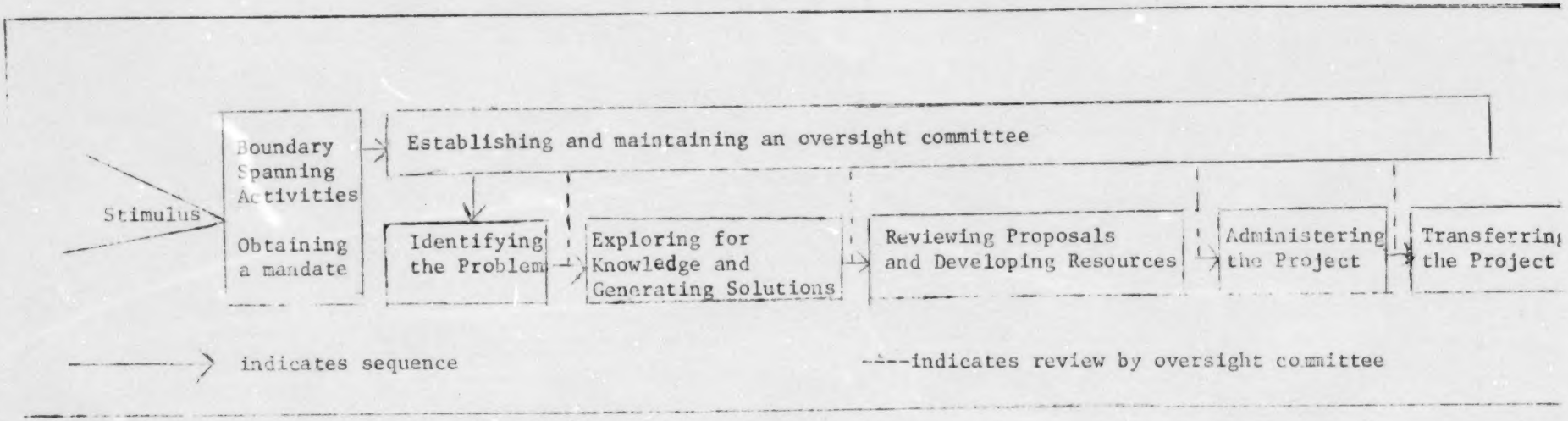

Figure 2

STAGES IN PROGRAM MANAGEMENT